CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES.

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EDITED BY

AYLETT RAINS.

Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.—JUDE.

THE EDITOR'S ADDRESS.

COURTEOUS READER:

We live in a country, over which the Divine benignity has waved the gentlest sceptre, and distilled the sweetest influences. Privileges, civil, religious and political, are guaranteed to us by the constitution under which we live, such as are not enjoyed by any other nation under heaven. Here, every man may sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no earthly power dares molest him, or make him afraid. Our constitution and laws are peculiarly favorable to free investigation, and liberal discussion; and hence much truth has been, and will continue to be elicited. In this country, the ravings of the fanatic, and the intolerancies of the bigot, excite no serious alarm. The madness of faction is curbed; and the streams of party malignity are, by the genius of our government, confined within their own sickly channels. We breathe, or rather we might breathe, did we not abuse our privileges, the pure atmosphere of a typical paradise. Sitting under the expansive branches of the majestic tree of liberty, it is ours to exult in the improvement, the independence, the liberty, and the

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happiness of our country. We behold with deep interest, and pleasing anticipation, the gigantic march of mind, which at present characterizes the inhabitants of the United States; and fondly contemplate the happiness, which, as the ultimatum of moral and physical improvement, will be the blissful inheritance of the sons and daughters of our America.

But let us be cautious, lest while enjoying the benefactions of our Creator, we lose sight of the giver, amidst the multiplicity of his gifts. A people swimming, as we are, in prosperity, ought, above all other people, to live in the perpetual exercise of grateful emotions, and to omit no diligence in conforming our lives to the Divine rule of holiness. Besides, in a government such as is ours, it is of vast importance, that the people be upright. The people being the fountain whence all the streams of government flow, government must necessarily partake of the purity or impurity of its fountain. Hence national prosperity and adversity, union and anarchy, preservation and destruction, may, by the united testimony of all history and all experience, be generally traced to their opposite causes, of purity or impurity, folly or wisdom in the people.

If the above remarks be true, as cannot, I think, be denied, with what diligent exactness ought we to guard from pollution, this source, from the purity or impurity of which such roses of prosperity may bud, or such accumulated ills may flow! Every demoralizing system of religion, and of irreligion, ought with untiring disapprobation to be expelled from our political family; and nothing should be considered as being worthy of the approbation of a wise or a good man, not calculated to subserve the general good, by contributing to the general improvement of our species.

But it may be asked, whether the writer of this article would recommend coercion, by which to destroy or impede the progress of demoralizing speculations? To this he would answer in the negative. Truth, omnipotent truth, is the only lawful weapon, in a combat between "*darkness*" and "*light*." "If we know the truth, the truth will make us free." Coercion may make hypocrites; it can never make truer men. Ignorance is the most formidable enemy with which the advocate for truth has to encounter; and coercion can never remove ignorance. Nothing, but the living influences of the day-spring from on high, can dispel the midnight of the mind, or enlighten the sightless eye-balls of the human understanding. If, then, error, in any of its ten thousand forms, should present itself in battle array, truth is the weapon which we must, is the only successful weapon which we can use. Ignorance and falsehood will flee before truth, as the white mists of the valley flee before the beams of the rising sun.

But a very important question, at this time, presents itself to my mind. *What is truth?* Some men would answer, "*It is the reality of all things, past, present and future.*" But as the question might still be asked, "*What is this reality?*" I will only say at present, that if the Bible contain not a revelation of *truth*, I despair of ever answering the above question. Deprive me of my Bible, and you surround me with darkness, worse than death. You bury all my hopes; you debase all my intellectual powers; you constrain all my affections to grovel in the dust. I become a beast. I am bereft of all rational happiness. It is true, that from experience I may know something of the present, and from history may learn something of the events of past ages; but at the same time, futurity, and that part of futurity, too, in which I feel myself most deeply interested, con-

ceals labyrinths unexplored and unrevealed, which, without the aid of revelation, leaves, and must for ever leave, "an aching void within my breast." God has given me a being, the perpetuation of which I value more highly than all things on earth besides. He has so constituted me, that I pant for immortality! And can I be happy here, suspended, as I am, by a brittle thread, not knowing what breeze may break it, nor what wave may roll me into inconsciousness? No; without the hope of immortality, I cannot be happy.

But the Bible brings "life and immortality to light." Not all the learning of polite Greece, the philosophy of triumphant Rome, nor the sophistical refinements and fascinating speculations of all our modern illuminati, can disarm death of his sting, or give one soul hope beyond the grave! But the Bible enables me to sing, "O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

In this work, I design, for the benefit of the rising generation, to exhibit the evidences of the religion of Jesus Christ. A work of this kind has long been considered a *desideratum*. Unbelievers have recently increased alarmingly in the United States; and have formed many plans of attack against the Christian religion, by which they have been too successful in unsettling the minds of multitudes, and of leading them into the frigid wastes of infidelity, where the sun of righteousness never shines. Now, if the Christian religion have not sufficient evidence to support it, I, for one, would say, let it fall. But as it is most firmly believed, that this religion can be abundantly supported by evidence, firm as the pillars of the heavens, the writer of this article would call upon all orders of society,

to give the evidences of this religion a serious and impartial hearing. Truth never dreads an investigation. In the primitive age of Christianity, the apostles, and all the primitive preachers, stood forth, the able champions of that "faith which was once delivered to the saints;" and in the succeeding ages of the church, Christianity has been successfully defended by its advocates, against all the arguments, derisions and calumnies of its enemies.

Now, as it is essential to the well being of the nation, whether considered in an individual or collective capacity, that its morals be preserved uncontaminated, infidelity ought to be *crushed*, except it can recommend itself by sanctions, better calculated to render man virtuous and happy, than Christianity can do. That it cannot do this, I think is obvious. But this is not the proper place, in which to discuss this question. Experience has taught me, that infidelity, by which I mean deism and atheism, vitiates the human mind; that it is a moral *bohon upas;* and that if any remain in its shade any considerable time, without an obvious decline in morality, it is because Christian habits had previously secured them against its deleterious qualities. It would, at least, be foolish for us to reject the Christian religion, until such time as something evidently better shall be presented. Besides, if the Christian religion be, as it professes to be, a revelation from Heaven, without doubt it must be the best religion in the universe: it must be the religion of Heaven! To prove that this religion is a revelation from Heaven, is, therefore, the design of the present volume.

The present volume of this work will, probably, not contain a great quantity of original matter. It professes to be, chiefly, a compilation. Much has been already written, and much has been well written, on this subject. The

editor has already collected a rich variety of interesting materials, from the best authors, which he means to communicate to his patrons, through the medium of this periodical. He is dependent on the public for funds, with which to progress in this work; and he hopes, that the subject will create sufficient interest in the minds of all genuine lovers of piety, abundantly to support it. Wherever the spirit of Christ is, there must be a proportionate zeal for the welfare of Zion, and a correspondent energy for the promotion of that welfare, by all practicable methods. The sleepy, indolent professor deserves not the name of Christian. The monster unbelief is now swallowing, one after another, the hope, the strength, the ornament of our country. Will Christians supinely sit, and indolently fold their hands, under such circumstances? No; factionists may; but Christians will, must be on the alert. If people were generally acquainted with the evidences of the Christian religion, infidelity could not exist; for it subsists on ignorance of truth.

This is a subject, the most interesting, the most important, that ever was comprehended within the limits of the human mind. Here life and death, happiness and misery, earth and heaven, time and eternity, concentrate all their tremendous realities. If the Scriptures be false, then, indeed, may ours be a fatherless world, an orphan family, a friendless race! Then we shall have no compass, no chart, no friendly haven, no abiding country, no continuing city, no kind Father in heaven!! We are lost! We shall be for ever lost!!! There is no sun to make our day, no star to direct our feet to him who hath said, "*Because I live, ye shall live also.*" From such soul-chilling conclusions may kind Heaven deliver us! Ed.

THE *resurrection* being the centre of Christianity, the foundation upon which its whole magnificent superstructure is erected, we think it right to commence this work with proof of this *fact*. If there be not a sufficiency of *testimony*, with which clearly to prove the *resurrection* of Jesus; or if there be *evidence*, by which those *testimonies* by which we may prove this *resurrection*, can be invalidated, the Christian scheme must fall. But from a somewhat extensive investigation of this subject, I am happy to announce to my readers, my firm persuasion, that the *evidences* of *this* essential *fact* will, after impartial examination, be found to be neither deficient, nor liable to be invalidated. We design giving *this subject* a somewhat comprehensive examination, before we proceed to the investigation of other subjects. ☞ Reader! attend to the following investigation, with *seriousness* and *impartiality*.

ED.

ON THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

BY DR. PRIESTLY.

WE cannot imagine any question more interesting to man, than whether he shall survive the grave, so that he shall live, and especially live for ever, after he has been dead. Every question relating to our condition *here* is of no moment at all, when compared to *this*.

Nothing that we see in nature can lead us to form any such expectation. I say *expectation*. For though some appearances may lead us to indulge a *wish*, and in some persons perhaps encourage a *hope*, of another life after this, yet if we were left to the mere light of nature, it would remain improbable upon the whole; so that we could not, in this situation, die with any reasonable prospect of living again.

But were it possible, by the force of any reasoning, to discover the *probability* of a future state, (and few persons

will pretend that they can, by the light of nature, arrive at *certainty* with respect to it,) the reasons, whatever they were, that made so great an event probable to one, might give no satisfaction to another.

Besides, the magnitude of the question is such, and the interest we have in such solution of it is so great, that nothing but the strongest and clearest evidence could give general satifaction with respect to it. Nothing less than a positive assurance from our Maker himself could answer this purpose. And this (which if any thing could be said to require it, did so) revelation informs us has been given; and in such a manner as must give entire satisfaction to every unprejudiced mind, *life and immortality being fully brought to light by the gospel*, as I hope to evince in the prosecution of this discourse.

It could not be expected that the Divine Being should give this assurance to every individual of the human race. It would be sufficient if it was given to some, to be communicated, with proper evidence of the fact, to others; and unless the communication was made to every person, this is all that could be done in the case. For this truth is of such a nature as to be incapable of strict or mathematical demonstration, such as that of twice two making four, but only of such proof as historical facts are capable of. But the evidence of a future state should not be undervalued on that account; because there are no kinds of truth of which we have a more firm persuasion, than of those of the historical kind; as for example, that such a person as Julius Cæsar once lived at Rome, and that there exists at present such a city as Constantinople. What propositions do we believe more firmly than we do these? Now, if our faith in a future life can be shown to be as well founded as these are, it is quite sufficient for the purpose; because it will be a faith that men will not scruple to *act* upon. They would then live as expectants of immortality, and would do nothing that should imply a doubt of a future state; that is, they would lead virtuous lives, which is the end of all religion.

In what manner God was pleased to impart to mankind the first information concerning a future life, we are not now acquainted, as we have no account of it in the writings

of Moses, or in any other writings now extant. But we see the *effect* of it in the Jews, who to this day are all firm believers in it; and, with a few exceptions, appear always to have believed in it. We may, therefore, presume, that in some period of time past, mankind, or at least the ancestors of that nation, had satisfactory evidence of the Divine Being having given them this assurance. Because it is an idea, that we cannot well suppose would ever have occurred to men themselves.

The original record of the communication of this most important truth having been lost, it pleased the Divine Being to renew it by Jesus Christ, the founder of our religion; who not only asserted the doctrine, as from God, and confirmed by miracles, or such works as no man could have done if God had not been with him, but who himself actually died and rose again, as a proof of the reality of the thing. And this seems to have been all the evidence that mankind could have asked, if the most intelligent, and the most incredulous of them, had been required to say what would satisfy them.

As Jesus rested the evidence of his divine mission, and consequently his authority to preach the doctrine of a future life, in a more particular manner upon his own resurrection from the dead; and as, in all cases, examples have the greatest weight with mankind, I shall confine myself at this time to the consideration of the circumstances of his death and resurrection, shewing them to have been such as render those important events in the highest degree credible, both at the time when they took place, and, which is of much more consequence, in all future time. So that, had mankind, not only in that period, but in the most distant ages, been required to name the evidence that would give them the most satisfaction, it would appear that it has been given them; and that, in any other circumstances than the actual ones, the events would have appeared less credible than they do at present.

I shall first consider the circumstances which tend to give peculiar strength to the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, and then reply to some objections which have been made to it.

1. His death was not private, among his friends, but in public, and accomplished by his enemies, who, we may be sure, would not leave their own great purpose unfinished, when it was in their power completely to effect it. This we cannot doubt to have been the principal reason, in the plan of divine Providence, why Jesus was executed as a criminal, in consequence of the sentence of a public court of justice. After this, no reasonable doubt could be entertained of the reality of his death. Accordingly, it does not appear that any doubt was entertained of it at the time, by those who were the best judges, and who were, at the same time, the most interested to dispute the fact. And this is all that we can reasonably require at this day.

It is true that Jesus expired sooner than other persons usually did in the same circumstances. But this might be owing to his having a more delicate constitution, and especially to his having been so much exhausted by his severe agony in the garden the preceding night; an agony which affected him so much, that it would not have been extraordinary if he had actually died in consequence of it; since such consternation and terror as he appears to have been in is well known to have been, of itself, the cause of death to many persons.

The death of Jesus was so evident to the soldiers who attended the execution, and who, no doubt, (being used to the business,) were sufficient judges of the signs of death, that, concluding him to be actually dead, they did not break his bones, as they did those of the other persons who were executed along with him. One of them, however, did what was fully equivalent to it; for he thrust a spear into his side, so that blood and water evidently flowed out of the wound. Now though we may be at a loss to account for the *water*, it was certainly impossible so to pierce the body as that *blood* should visibly, and instantly, flow from the wound, without piercing either the heart itself, or some large blood vessel, the rupture of which would have been mortal.

After this, Jesus was taken down from the cross, was swathed in spices, as the bodies of persons of distinction among the Jews usually were, was left in that state, without any appearance of life, and deposited in a cold sepulchre,

where he could have no assistance to bring him to life if any remains of life had been in him. Can we then have any doubt of Jesus having been unquestionably dead, when both friends and enemies had no doubt at the time on the subject?

2. The circumstances of the reappearing of Jesus after his crucifixion were such, as were calculated to give the greatest satisfaction possible. The first of them were made when, it is evident, his disciples had no expectation whatever of any such event, so that they could not have been imposed upon by their fond imaginations. For though Jesus had plainly apprized his disciples that he was to be put to death, and that he should rise again on the third day, they had so fixed a persuasion that he was to be a great king, and consequently not to die at all, that they probably concluded (as he had been used to speak to them in figurative language) that by *death* he only meant some trial, or calamity, and that therefore by a *resurrection* he meant his emerging from it. But whatever their ideas were, it is most evident from the history, that they had no expectation either of his death, or of his resurrection, and that his death only filled them with consternation and despair, and did not at all lead them to expect his resurrection.

After Jesus had appeared in this unexpected manner to several of his disciples, viz. to Mary Magdalene, to the two disciples walking to Emmaus, to the ten who were assembled in the evening of the same day at Jerusalem, and probably to Peter also, he appointed a time and place when he would meet them all, at a sufficient distance from the time of his speaking. Consequently, if any doubts remained on the minds of any of them, they had time to consider what satisfaction they required, and might, of course, be prepared to get that satisfaction, which it is evident he never refused them, even offering himself to be handled and examined by them at their leisure, and eating and drinking along with them. Indeed, the marks of crucifixion on his hands and feet, and the wound in his side, were abundantly sufficient to identify his person. What is recorded concerning Thomas, was probably the case of many others; nor did his incredulity exceed that of the rest, though he expressed it in a stronger manner; and the satisfaction that Jesus

gave to Thomas, he was, no doubt, as ready to give to any others of them.

3. The appearances were sufficiently frequent, viz. four times on the day of resurrection, first to Mary Magdalene, then to Peter, then to the two disciples walking to Emmaus, then to the ten in the absence of Thomas, and afterwards to all the eleven. In Galilee he first appeared unexpectedly to Peter, John, and a few others, and then to more than five hundred at once. This must have been the great meeting by appointment, though particularly mentioned by Paul only. Another time he appeared to James, called his brother, or near relation, then to all the disciples (who were more than an hundred) residing at Jerusalem, when he went with them to the mount of Olives, and at leisure ascended above the clouds in their sight. Though these are all the appearances that are particularly recorded, there were probably many more, for no one writer has mentioned all these, not even Paul, who seems to have intended to recite all that he could recollect at that time. None of these appearances, I would also observe, were at midnight, when persons, suddenly awaking from sleep, have not the perfect use of their senses and judgment; but in the day; not at a distance, but quite near; and not transient, but of a sufficient length of time.

Surely, then, we are authorized to say that, as far as *numbers* were requisite to give evidence concerning any particular event, these were quite sufficient. For if the evidence of five hundred would not remove the doubts of any persons, neither would that of five thousand, or of any number whatever. They were also persons who had every character of unexceptionable witnesses, as they cannot be supposed to have been deceived themselves, or to have had any motive to wish to impose upon others; because they had no interest in doing it.

4. The appearances were continued to a sufficient period, viz. the space of forty days, which was certainly time enough for any person to recollect themselves, to get over any impression of surprise, and to be perfectly collected, so as to be put upon their guard against any cause of deception, and to examine and satisfy themselves at their full leisure.

Such is the direct evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, than which nothing can well be conceived to be stronger, resting upon the testimony of a sufficient number of the most competent witnesses, not prepossessed in favor of an *expected* event, and who yet had time to recover from the surprise occasioned by an *unexpected* one. It was also a testimony to which they all adhered through life, notwithstanding the greatest temptation that men could lie under to tell a different story.

I shall now consider some objections that have been made to this evidence.

1. It has been said that Jesus ought to have continued longer in a state of death, as till the body had putrified, &c. so that the revival of it might have been the more extraordinary. In this view, no doubt, the evidence of a proper resurrection might have been made more striking. But then, though the evidence would have gained strength in one way, it would, by this very means, have lost much more in another. Not to say that a resurrection from any state of unquestionable death, is as much a proof of a real miracle, as from any other state. That is, it required nothing less than a *divine power*, which is undoubtedly equal to the raising a man from death at any period, as well as the making of any number of new men.

But had the resurrection of Jesus been at any considerable distance of time, the evidence of his *death*, and consequently that of a miracle in his *resurrection*, had not been so clear. For then it might have been said that, in so long a time, he might have recovered from the effect of a seeming death; that his disciples had time to recover from their consternation, and lay their schemes for any particular purpose; that, in so long an interval, the guard of the sepulchre might have been more negligently kept, the seal on the stone might have been broken by some accident, and Jesus, being alive, might have been conveyed away, and time given for his appearance, as raised from the dead.

But considering that Jesus was taken down from the cross, to all appearance at least dead, and left in the state of a corpse, swathed in spices, late on Friday evening, and then left alone, in a cold sepulchre, it was absolutely impossible, whatever life may be supposed to have remained

in him, that he should have appeared not only alive, but in perfect health and vigor, walking about and conversing, as if nothing at all had been done to him, so early as at day-break on the Sunday following. In the evening of that day he walked from Jerusalem to Emmaus, which was about eight miles, and also back again, and as speedily as two men in health, and who made all the haste they could, were able to do the same. This is the more extraordinary, considering the wounds that had been made in the *feet* of Jesus. If a man had suffered nothing more than this piercing of his feet, in the rough manner in which it was, no doubt, done in the act of crucifixion, this walk alone would have been absolutely impossible; and on the third day he would have been even less able to walk than on the first, from the inflammation of the wounds. There must, therefore, have been some miracle in the case; and if any miracle was performed, why not that of a real resurrection?

It may be said, that the evidence of a real miracle would have been still stronger if the bones of Jesus had been broken, like those of the two thieves. But as the piercing of his feet, the wound in his side, and even the hanging so long on the cross, must have effectually incapacitated him from walking abroad within two days, the breaking of his bones would have made no real addition to the evidence; the *impossibility* of his walking abroad being really the same in both cases. There would have been a difference only in the case of *probabilities*, which vary with circumstances. But any one natural and absolute *impossibility* furnishes as strong an argument as another.

In this very important view, therefore, the less was the time that intervened between Jesus' having been laid in the sepulchre, and his appearance alive and well out of it, the stronger is the evidence of a divine interposition, and unbelievers would have had more to object if that interval had been longer, than they can have at present. Jesus, we can now say, appeared alive and well sooner than it was *possible*, in the ordinary course of nature, that he could have done. It was before the guard could have been relaxed; before the disciples could have recovered from their consternation; and especially before it was possible for him to have recovered from the languishing state in which cru-

cifixion must have left any man; to say nothing of the wound he had received in his side, which alone, if it had missed any vital part, must have confined him, and have disabled him from going abroad, a very long time.

2. It may be proper to take some notice of the story that was propagated by the Jewish priests, who, when the guard fled at the appearance of the angel and the earthquake, bade them say that *the disciples of Jesus came by night, and stole him away while they slept.* This, however, was both in the highest degree improbable, and what is more, it would not have answered any purpose; so that they who had just before behaved in the most cowardly manner possible, must have risked their lives for nothing. Indeed, such a story as this would hardly have been suggested by the enemies of Christianity, if any thing had been known at the time besides the earthquake, the appearance of the angel, and a suspicion, perhaps a report, of the absence of the body, and if any thing had occurred to them more plausible at the time. So weak a defence almost amounts to a confession of the weakness of the cause to be supported by it.

The improbability alone of any considerable number of men all sleeping, whose business it was to keep awake, and not more than two or three hours, for which they had time enough to prepare themselves by sleeping the preceding part of the night, (for this was the last watch, at break of day,) and when the penalty of sleeping was death; and that they should all sleep so soundly, as that the rolling of a large stone, (so large that several women despaired of being able to move it,) and this quite near to them, should not awake any one of them, is far too great to be admitted.

The disciples of Jesus, if such a scheme had come into their minds, dispirited and dispersed as they were, could have had no expectation of accomplishing it *undiscovered*, even if there had been no guard at the sepulchre. The city of Jerusalem was at that time full of people, beyond any thing that we can have an idea of at present, being the passover, and when the moon was at the full, so that numbers of people (the houses of the city not being sufficient to receive them) would be walking about at all hours; and the sepulchre was so near to the city, that it is now enclosed

within the walls. In that climate, and at that time of the year, there was no inconvenience in passing the whole night, and even sleeping, in the open air. The preceding night Jesus and his disciples had passed in a neighboring garden; and it is very probable that they had done the same before, since Judas expected to find them there. In these circumstances, the disciples could not have had any reasonable expectation of removing the body undiscovered.

Besides, what would the removal of a mere corpse, admitting that they might have had the courage and address to succeed in so unpromising an attempt, have availed them? There would have been no evidence of a *resurrection*, unless the dead man could have been exhibited alive, which it was certainly out of their power to do.

If a few of the disciples of Jesus had been so abandoned, and at the same time so stupid, as to have attempted an imposition of this kind, an imposition from which they could not have derived any imaginable advantage, how could they have made others believe a resurrection of which they saw no evidence? Would the mere absence of the body have satisfied Thomas, (who, though one of the twelve, was certainly not in the secret,) the five hundred who went by appointment into Galilee, or the thousands who were converted by Peter immediately after this event; and would none of them have abandoned so groundless a faith in time of persecution? Would not torture, and the prospect of death, have extorted a confession of the cheat from some of those who were in the secret.

Lastly, what prospect could the disciples of Jesus have had of being able to carry on the scheme that was begun by their master, without his power of working miracles, of which they must have known themselves to be destitute? It was, no doubt, the possession of this power, and this alone, that emboldened them, disappointed and dispirited as they had been before, to persist in the same scheme, and without this they would certainly have absconded, and have been no more heard of. They were neither orators, nor warriors, and therefore were destitute of all the natural means of success.

3. The objection that has been urged in the strongest manner, and to which I must, therefore, give the more par-

ticular attention, is, that after his resurrection, Jesus should have appeared as publicly as he had done before his death, and especially in the presence of his judges, and of his enemies. This, they say, would have satisfied them, and the whole country, and of course all the world, so that no doubt would have remained on the subject.

But the resurrection of Jesus himself might not have conciliated those who were only the more exasperated at the resurrection of Lazarus, at which themselves were present, from whatever source their obstinacy and incredulity arose. The whole story, how well soever attested, might have been laughed at in Greece and at Rome, where the Jews and every thing relating to them, were, without any examination into the subject, held in the greatest contempt. Besides, there would have been a want of dignity, and an appearance of insult, unworthy of our Saviour's character, in thus ostentatiously exhibiting himself before his enemies, and, as it were, mocking at their attempts to kill him.

I would farther observe, that though Jesus did not appear to *all* his enemies, he did appear to *one* of them, and one whom no person will doubt to have been as prejudiced, and as inveterate, as any of them, viz. Paul. Now, as *this* enemy of Christianity was convinced of the truth of the resurrection, by Jesus appearing to him in person, we cannot doubt but that, if it had suited the plan of Divine Providence, *all* the Jews might have been convinced by the same means, and have become Christians.

But admitting that the consequence of such a public appearance of Jesus would have been the conviction of all that country, and of all that age, it would have been an unfavorable circumstance with respect to the evidence at this distance of time, and still more so in remoter ages. And the great object certainly was, that this important event should be so circumstanced, as that it should preserve its credit unimpaired to the end of time.

If we suppose that mankind in the most distant ages of the world had been asked, what kind of evidence would satisfy *them*, with respect to the reality of an event which took place several thousand years before they were born, they would certainly say, that, to give satisfaction to *them* who had no opportunity of examining into the fact them-

selves, it should have been so circumstanced, as that besides a sufficient number of persons attesting the truth of it, friends and enemies, believers and unbelievers, should clearly appear to have been sufficiently *interested* to examine into the truth, while the fact was *recent*, and therefore while it was in their power to investigate it thoroughly. And this could only be in circumstances in which some should believe it and others not, and in which the believers should have every temptation to renounce their belief, and their enemies every motive to detect the imposture. But this could not have been the case if the resurrection of Jesus had been universally believed at the time, or in that age, and consequently there had been no early persecution of Christians.

In these circumstances, it might have been said by unbelievers in remote ages, that, as no opposition was made to the progress of Christianity, it did not appear to them that the reality of those facts on which the belief of it is founded, had been sufficiently inquired into at the time, that it might have been found convenient (for reasons now unknown, and at this distance inscrutable,) to make a change in the religion of the country; and that, as the rulers of it adopted the measure, it might, for any thing that appeared, have been originally a scheme of *theirs;* and that when the governors of any country interest themselves to promote any measure, it is always in their power to impose upon the vulgar; that private orders, for example, might have been given, that Jesus, though suspended on a cross, should not be much hurt; that the sepulchre, being under ground, might have proper apartments adjoining to it, where there might be every accommodation that was requisite for his complete recovery and refreshment; and that a few leading persons being in the secret, the rest might be imposed upon to believe the story of a resurrection, or any thing else.

Thus the origin of Christianity, it might have been said, did not materially differ from that of the several species of heathenism or Mahometanism, which the people first believed without any proper inquiry, and to which their descendants adhered, because they had been received by their ancestors before them.

But the circumstances attending the actual promulgation of Christianity were such, as that nothing of this kind can ever be advanced by any unbelievers, at all acquainted with the history of the times; because it is evident, that Jesus Christ, and his religion, and especially the account of his resurrection, on which the whole of it hinged, immediately engaged the closest attention of great numbers, and that thousands felt themselves interested in the highest degree to examine into the truth of it.

In the first place, the apostles, and other primitive Christians, were certainly interested not to give up their ease, their little fortunes, and their lives, for an idle tale. And, on the other hand, the chief priests and rulers of the Jews, who had been so much exasperated at Jesus as to procure his death, even with some risk to themselves, from his popularity with the common people, would feel themselves more strongly interested to suppress his followers, and his religion, after his death; and this they evidently did, without losing any time in the business.

Not more than fifty days elapsed between the crucifixion of Jesus, and the most open publication of the account of his resurrection, an event spoken of even before his death, against any imposition with respect to which all possible precautions had been taken, and concerning which many rumours must have prevailed from the passover to Pentecost, (for no secret was enjoined with respect to it,) from the very day of his appearance. On the day of Pentecost, however, it was boldly asserted by such a number of persons, who were witnesses of the fact, that some thousands (who had themselves seen the miracles of Jesus) were fully convinced of its truth, and gave public testimony of their faith by being immediately baptized.

Observe in how full and explicit a manner Peter, on this occasion, gave his testimony, as quoted in the preceding Discourse, Acts ii. 22. "Ye men of Israel, hear my words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him, in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know; him ye have taken, and with wicked hands have crucified and slain.—This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all (and about one hundred and twenty were then with him) are witnesses."

The boldness of the apostles in giving this public testimony to the resurrection of Jesus, a testimony which his audience evidently could not contradict, exasperated the rulers of the country to the highest degree; and the event being then recent, they would, no doubt, do every thing that men, and men in power, could do in order to discover the cheat, if any such had been used.

This endeavour to suppress Christianity began in the very country, and in the very city, in which it was first promulgated, where Jesus had always appeared in public, and consequently where himself, and all that he had done, were known to thousands. And this violent opposition, than which we know of nothing in the history of mankind more violent, and which began as early as it was possible for it to begin, was continued by the Jews, with very few interruptions, till it was taken up by the Romans, who were alarmed at the rapid spread of the new religion, which soon appeared to be hostile to all the old ones, on the observance of which it was universally imagined that the temporal prosperity of states depended. And this persecution of Christianity did not end till about three hundred years after its promulgation, that is, till all farther scrutiny into the facts was equally impossible and needless.

Did not this situation of things most strongly invite all persons to make the most rigorous inquiry into the truth of the facts on which Christianity was founded, and especially that of the resurrection of Jesus? Would not all of the five hundred as long as they lived (and according to Paul many of them were living in the year 52, and the apostle John, it is supposed, did not die till about A. D. 90) be continually speaking of it, and examined concerning it. This would certainly be the case if any such event had happened at this day, and human nature we cannot doubt to have been the same in all ages.

What, then, could any of those who are now unbelievers in Christianity have done, if they had been living at the time of the promulgation of it, more than other believers did, who, whatever else they might do, or say, could not discover any marks of imposture. No other facts in the whole compass of history, we may safely venture to assert, ever underwent a thousandth part of the investigation that, from the

nature of the circumstances, *these* must have done; and, what is of particular consequence, at the time when the investigation was the most easy.

Though Jesus did not appear in public after his resurrection, the miracle of *the descent of the Holy Spirit*, enabling the apostles and other disciples to speak intelligibly, languages which they had not been taught, and also many other miracles wrought by them, were as public as possible; and every miracle wrought by the apostles was, in fact, a proof of the resurrection of their master. If his mission, confirmed by, and implying the truth of, his resurrection, was not from God, neither was theirs; for both were part of the same scheme, and therefore they imply one another.

Thus our faith does not rest on the testimony of the four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, who wrote the history of Christ, and of the promulgation of Christianity. We have, in fact, the testimony of the age in which they lived, to the great events recorded by them. These books, or ever so many of the same nature, could never have been received, and transmitted to us, as authentic histories, in the circumstances that I have described, if the contents of them could have been questioned.

The inconsistencies that we discover in the accounts of the four evangelists imply no defect in the evidence; being no greater than are usually found in the narratives of any important event written by different persons; who will always attend chiefly to what is most essential to the story, and less to the minute circumstances of it; and these narratives were all written a considerable time after the event.—But the most important consideration is, that these histories were not the cause of the belief of the resurrection of Jesus, but were themselves among the consequences of that belief, the proper evidence having produced its full effect long before they were written; so that it could not have been deficient in any material respect.

That all mankind were not immediately convinced of the truth of Christianity may be sufficiently accounted for; as, from the little interest that great numbers take in any thing relating to *religion;* from the aversion which the greatest part of mankind have to examine into any thing that is *new*, when it is hostile to that which is *old*, and their listen-

ing to any idle tales to the prejudice of those who teach it, which we see every day. And if the powerful, the learned and polite, and whose prejudices, especially against any thing that originates with the *illiterate*, are well known to be as strong as any prejudices whatever, would not read or think seriously on the subject (which was evidently the case with the generality of the Greek and Roman philosophers, and other persons of distinction at that time) many would be influenced by their example, and join in a blind opposition to what they had never considered, from imagining that it was not worth their while to consider it.

Besides all this, we are to consider the great numbers who were, directly or indirectly, interested in the support of the old established systems of religion, who would feel themselves exasperated, and therefore, without any inquiry into the merits of the case, would, with all their might, oppose the progress of the new religion. Such would be the case with many persons of eminence and influence; and the lower orders, the mob, might be inflamed by any idle tales. This is nothing more than the common fate of all reformers, and all reformations in matters of religion. It flows from the common principles of human nature, which are the same in all ages, and which operate in the same manner in all similar circumstances.

In this state things continued as long as they possibly could, the friends and the enemies of Christianity being equally interested to discover the truth, while the facts were at all recent, and most easy to be investigated: and the new religion established itself gradually, as, if founded on truth, and unaided by power, it naturally would do in such circumstances. The attention of the more dispassionate and disinterested was gradually gained, and converts were in time made of some men of learning, who were capable of writing in defence of Christianity, and whose writings made other converts, both philosophers and others.

At length the converts to Christianity in all places, and especially in those that were the nearest to the scene of the transactions, were so numerous, that the old religion sunk into general contempt and neglect; and in less than three hundred years after the promulgation of Christianity, we see that, notwithstanding the deep-rooted attachment of all the

heathen world to the religion of their ancestors, Constantine could safely declare himself a Christian, without any apprehension from his competitors, who endeavored to avail themselves of that circumstance. None of them, however, were able, by this means, to throw any considerable obstacle in his way, and he reigned almost in peace, and a longer time than any of the emperors after Augustus.

This is a clear proof of the preceding spread of Christianity, and of the hold which it had got on the minds of the people in general; and this was in the most disadvantageous circumstances that can be imagined, if it had been an imposture. But this most striking evidence of the truth of Christianity we could not now have had, if the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus had been such, as to have convinced all the Jews, and all the world, as soon as he appeared. What had been the most satisfactory to *them* would have been (from the nature of the thing) the least so to *us*.

When the persecution of Christianity began, the facts on which it was founded were recent, so that it was in the power of men of sense and inquiry to satisfy themselves concerning them; and we have seen that they were sufficiently interested so to do. But if one whole generation should have been, as we say, *infatuated*, so as to have taken up the belief of these facts without any sufficient reason, the next generation might have been sensible of this, and have made more diligent search (and then it was not too late) and not have thrown away their fortunes and their lives for nothing, as their fathers had done before them. But notwithstanding this, every inquiry continued to make more converts, till, without any aid from power, or from learning in the first instance, the new religion completely established itself on the ruins of the old, and was embraced by persons of all ranks without distinction, the rich and the poor, the philosophers and the vulgar.

If all this could take place without there being any truth in the history of the miracles, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus, it must have been more extraordinary, nay, strictly speaking, more miraculous, than those events themselves. For human nature was the same then that it is now; and that *men*, such as we now find them to be, should, in the circumstances that I have now described, have been

impressed as the early converts to Christianity were; that they should have been induced to believe a story which they might easily have discovered to be destitute of foundation, and have sacrificed so much as they did to their belief, must have been the greatest of all miracles; no natural cause being adequate to such an effect. It must also have been so stupendous a miracle, (operating on *the minds of men*, which is more extraordinary than any effect that is apparent to the senses,) without any rational end or object. Nay, the Divine Being must have wrought this miracle with no other view than to puzzle and confound his creatures, and to involve some of the most deserving of them in the greatest calamities. On the other hand, the miracles which gave birth to Christianity had the greatest and noblest of all objects, the instruction and reformation of the world. In fact, the proof of Christianity supplies the only probable method of accounting for past and present *appearances*, and therefore what a true *philosopher*, whose object it is to inquire into the *causes of things*, will adopt, in preference to any other.

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ERRATUM.—On the fourth page, eighth line from the bottom, for *unsuccessful* read *successful*.